Walkthrough Guide

Motivation

- Walkthroughs are a tried and true union organizing tactic. Grad workers often work in a distributed manner with relatively little supervision of their day-to-day activities, presenting us with an opportunity to reach workers during the work day simply by walking the halls and stopping people for a conversation, or even walking through work areas with another worker from that space to engage the people who work with them.
- It is critical that we are always trying new organizing tactics as no tactic will be successful in reaching everyone. By taking on a variety of organizing tactics, we can figure out what will work best for us at a given time and open up many routes to reaching a broader group of workers. Most importantly, walkthroughs do not filter out the people who we as individual organizers might assume are not interested or don't have issues, nor does it rely on worker self-selecting to approach the union.
- Currently, we also have an imbalance in our organizing strength, with some depts building valuable strength beyond what may be needed to organize their coworkers and others depts which need more support. This tactic can allow us to train and bring in organizers for walkthroughs in untapped parts of their own buildings, close by buildings, or even other parts of campus. This is going to be a necessary step for our campaign.
- Finally, we know that this tactic will be especially necessary for once we start to run our card campaign, where we will need to be more thorough in reaching all grad workers and more deliberate about getting to people who we cannot reach by other means. Getting more of our organizer comfortable and confident with these organizing practices will mean we can adopt them more seamlessly once we drop cards as well.

Checklist

- **Come up with a plan:** Decide where you want to go through and with what goals.
- **Practice the rap:** Before starting on walking the halls, practice together and get on the same page. Train new organizers!
- **Walk the halls:** Start covering the turf by speaking to whoever we can. Reflect and improve on the approach in between conversations.
- **Follow up:** Be sure to take next steps so the conversation doesn't end here. This is often just the start, and it can be much more effective if we follow up.

Basic Rap (Cold Walkthroughs)

- ***This covers the approach in a typical cold conversation in walkthroughs.***
- **[OPEN]** Hey! Are you a grad student here?
- Awesome! I'm a member of Grads 4 a Healthy MIT
    - **[EVENT]** and we're putting together this coffee & donut get together to start to rebuild community since we've been away from each other for so long! Can I give you a flyer for it?
    - **[GENERAL]** and we're a group that has been organizing around some of the sources of stress that grad students deal with here. We're just going around to

talk to get to know more people. Have you heard of the group? (can talk about past organizing and free weekly therapy win if they aren't)

- Great! My name is ____, btw, what's your name?
- Great to meet you! It's so great to meet new people in person after so long working remotely. What type of research do you do/who do you work with?
- That's awesome! I'm in the ____ department and I work with _____.
- *Ask questions to get to know them and generally how things are going.*
    - How has coming back into work from the pandemic been for you?
    - How was the Summer for you?
    - What is your Fall term looking like?
    - How long have you been at MIT?
- *Dig into their experience.*
    - What was their research like? How's their relationship with their PI? How is their group culture? Is it what they expected? Anything they felt like MIT could've done to better support them?
    - How's the move to Boston? How do they like the city? What do they do for fun? Do they have time for it? Do you live in grad housing? How's that been for you? If they live on campus ask how that's been! Try to identify issues and agitate on them.
    - What advice would they give to someone coming into their program or lab now?
- **[IF you hit on a good issue and the convo is going well either introduce the union and pivot the conversation there, or simply set up another time to talk with a plan and get their number]**
- **[UNION TRANSITION]** Definitely appreciate hearing your perspective on that! Our efforts with Grads for a Healthy MIT to make grad student's lives better is actually connected to a larger grad unionization effort where we are getting together with grad workers from across MIT to try to address these issues by building a union, like they are doing at Harvard, NYU, Brown, University of California, and many other grad schools.
- What do you think would be different about your experience if we had a union as grad students and had power and a voice to make changes?
- **[FOLLOW UP PLAN]**
    - **[EVENT]** It was great talking to you! See you at the event! Definitely feel free to bring along any of your labmates or friends too. Also I would be happy to chat more sometime. Do you have some time later this week? What's your _____ [pick a day or two] looking like? Great ____ at ____ works for me! Let me get your number so we can connect to meet up.
    - **[GENERAL]** It was great talking to you! I would love to discuss more sometime soon over coffee during one of your breaks or after work. Do you have some time later this week? What's your _____ [pick a day or two] looking like? Great ____ at ____ works for me! Let me get your number so we can connect to meet up.

Basic Rap (Introductions)

- ***This covers the approach in a typical walkthrough focused on making intros.***

- **[OPEN]** Hey, how's it going? I'm just going around to introduce people to ____, they're involved with the MIT GSU efforts. Would be great to talk about where we're at with that, do you have a minute now to talk?
- **[UPDATES]** If delivering information about e.g. the card campaign, make sure to build questions into that information to keep people engaged. Give broad strokes and let them ask
- **[ASK]** Have an ask coming into the conversation: need to talk to other people about the union to build up a supermajority, it would be great to get your help figuring out who's heard about it already, who we should talk to, etc
- The person being introduced should have a prominent speaking role to make it easier to set up future conversations.

Mapping and Planning

- Before doing walkthroughs, we should try to understand where we are going, who works there, and what their status is. We track much of this information in Airtable (though this is an ongoing process and the physical mapping of campus still needs a lot of work).
- The approach for areas will differ depending on the status of folks working there. For instance:
    - If we don't know who is in a building, we may want to first do a little reconn to see if we can find anything on the doors that will help us to know who is around these buildings, then we can check against Airtable what the status of those workers is.
    - If we know who is in the space, we can try to focus on the undercovered groups and depts which we know are present there.
    - If we have organizers in those spaces or generally strong supporters, we can ask them to help walk through with us, making introductions for us to those around them and setting up union conversations.
- Some examples plans might be:
    - *Organizers from DMSE in 13 walk 13, floor 4, with the goal of talking to people in RLE (subdivision of EECS) and, specifically, the Gedik group (undercovered group in physics). Using physical proximity to cover related depts.*
    - *Organizers from Physics walk building 6, floors 3 and 4 to cover CTP (division in physics that needs organizers). Using targeted outreach to a specific division with a physical concentration.*
    - *Organizers from ChemE in E19 walk the floors with IDSS and Econ grad workers. Using physical proximity to cover other depts.*
    - *Organizers from MAS walk to the Herr group with the union rep or a supporter in the group to make introductions and kick off conversations. Using current relationships to make intros.*

Training New Organizers

- Be sure to do practice conversations with organizers before we do walkthroughs, to make sure everyone is on the same page on the approach and feels comfortable and familiar with the basic rap. That will usually consist of the following:
    - Discussing the basic approach

    - Demonstrating as the organizer for one role play
    - Letting them practice as the organizer and give feedback
    - No one is going to be perfect at first, so just try to jump right in and get practice to improve!
- For training a group of organizers in a dept, use the following outline:
    - Motivation section for why we do walkthroughs (above) - DMQ
    - Basic rap / demo conversation
        - Opening demo - DMQ (organizer) / JR (grad worker)
        - Comments from the group
        - Basic structure of it - JR
        - Questions?
    - Practice - DMQ
    - Tips for approaching walkthroughs - DMQ
        - Questions?
    - Follow up process - DMQ
        - Questions?
    - Mapping and planning out next steps - JR
    - Practice

Walkthrough Tips

- **Be prepared!** Make sure that you have a plan before you meet, knowing where you will meet up and which buildings you are planning on hitting and for what purpose. If you are handing out flyers, be sure that you have already printed and cut them beforehand so you don't have to cut into your time where you could be talking to workers.
- **Who's leading?:** When walking through as a pair, figure out who is going to take the lead so we don't talk over each other. Try to have the lead demonstrate once or twice first, then encourage new organizers to take the lead once they are comfortable. Give each other feedback and sharpen the approach between conversations.
- **Talking to other depts:**
    - Connecting with people beyond our depts, especially for the most well organized depts, is going to be especially critical for our success. We want to ensure that organizers feel comfortable doing this despite some of the natural feelings of discomfort that can come with it.
    - Remember that their dept may not be like yours in many ways. Do not assume it is the same, just ask them how it works and stay curious. If you are walking through with someone from that dept, ask them for a brief run down on the structure and issues of their program. However, there are many commonalities which are shared and should be emphasized when you see them.
    - Making comparisons to the experience in your dept can be effective as you will be more of an authority on your dept. Generally, comparing across dept should be done with the goal of exposing the inconsistencies across MIT and the ways that grad workers in depts are shortchanged in different ways. Issues are typically not confined to individual depts, but can often have a common root that is worth connecting on.

        - Do they get paid differently when they get a fellowship? Less or more? How much more? Shouldn't we all get a good pay bump when we are bringing so much into the university?
        - How are relationships with advisors? Access to funding? How do TAships and RAships play out? What is the experience with quals?
    - Name dropping people who we know in the dept who are involved can be helpful for building more of a connection. Before starting our walkthroughs, check who the main organizers know to mention them as other people involved in the effort and ask if they know them too. This builds some more credibility.
- **Situational Awareness:**
    - What is the person up to? Is now a bad time to talk? If they seem in a hurry somewhere, deep in conversation, or actively engaged in their work, it might not be a good time and we can come back. If someone is eating, on their computer, or seems to be taking a break, it is probably a good opportunity to have a brief conversation. Remember, you can always ask. Watch their body language and send the right message with their own.
    - Keep an eye on any other activity in your surroundings. If you are in a fairly public area, try to move the conversation somewhere private or ask for their info and make a detailed plan (time and place) to continue the conversation soon, and don't forget to get their phone number. Be sure faculty aren't in earshot, and ideally only the one person you are talking with to have an easier time talking.
- **Be friendly and curious:** Make a connection and get to know people while also trying to talk about the issues they face. Strive to make it a union conversation if you are able to effectively get to their issues and agitate.
- **Know when to end it:** The conversation can sometimes start to drag on and not necessarily in the right direction. We want to be able to smoothly end the conversation, ideally on a point of agreement, before saying we'll see them at the event, where they can talk to others about what we've just been discussing, or setting up another 1-1 sometime over coffee.
- **Grads for a Healthy MIT (G4HMIT):** Until we go public, we operate publicly through Grads for a Healthy MIT, a union led group on campus which we have run numerous issue campaigns through to fight for change on campus, gaining broad recognition with grad workers and working with dozens of student groups.
    - **Talking points**
    - G4HMIT started in response to our experience as grad students at MIT seeing our friends and co-workers struggle with their mental health, and seeing a national reconning with the mental health crisis of grad workers, MIT being an especially stressful and demanding environment.
    - We were able to bring together grad students from across campus to collectively and publicly pressure the MIT admin to provide the mental health coverage the crisis demands and to address the root causes of our stress.
    - Ultimately, we were able to get major wins through our campaign, including free weekly therapy, 80% reduced co-pay for sessions beyond that, no copay on

anti-depressants, increased referral services, acces to telehealth, and trans inclusive benefits.
    - This has been a huge step to getting more grad students the help they need to navigate our incredible stressful lives, but we know that much more needs to be done to address the root causes which MIT admin were still intrasigent to address, even as they recognized the serious impact it has on us.
    - We fought for affordable housing, in addition to our work on improving grad health insurance and service access. In both cases, we ran into the challenge of dealing with a system that wanted to prioritize health and housing operating at a profit for MIT, not a subsidized part of an academic ecosystem supporting some of the Institute's lowest paid employees.
    - Our RISE campaign, co-led by G4HMIT, BGSA, and GSC DEI, fought to address issues around racism and sexism at MIT, by fighting for improved admissions and hiring processes, commitment of resources and institutional responsibility to improve DEI measurably, protections for students and accountability for those in power, and fair financial support for all members of our grad community.
    - We saw MIT continue to use working groups and empty rhetoric to avoid making real change on many of these demands. Ultimately, we were able to make our most important advances by getting more DEI officers hired throughout MIT, and creating an institute wide student-centric guaranteed transitional funding for switching labs. There is still much more work to do, but these advances were important and we aim to fight for more with your help!

Follow up

- **Log it:** Take notes of the conversations and debrief the walkthrough together right after you are done. Don't forget to enter the notes, including contact info, into Airtable.
- **Plans:** Be sure that you have some idea of a follow up for every conversation where applicable and who is going to do it. What is the next ask for them? How can we set it up? What is the earliest it can happen?
- **Text:** Texting is usually the most reliable way to follow up with new contacts. Try to keep the message relatively short, saying who you are, reiterating the follow up plan, and ideally referencing something that came up in the conversation
    - **Example:** Hey ____, it was great meeting you! This is ___ from MIT. I really appreciated what you mentioned about ____. Looking forward to coffee at Aera 4 on Thursday at 2pm. Does that still work for you?
- If they don't respond to your first text, don't be discouraged! People are busy and it is easy to miss it. Try to bump the message a day or two after you send the first one. Bumping your messages around 12-2pm usually works well for getting a response. Waiting until Monday is also usually better than texting during the weekend. If they don't reply to this, a call might do it!
    - **Example:** Hey, just wanted to give this a bump! Hope you're doing well :)
- **Asks:** When you get into a conversation with them, we want to have a more full union organizing conversation with them, ideally in person if possible. The main asks we are working on these days are expanding our network, either by them talking to those

around them as a new organizer or by making introductions. Either way, trying to set up 2-1s early on is going to be the best way to keep expanding.